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Former CCC director now city contractor

Lester provides direction on LCP

By Carina Woudenberg 3 hrs ago

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Former California Coastal Commission Executive Director Charles Lester has been tapped by the city of Half Moon Bay to assist in drafting of the city's Local Coastal Program. The hefty planning document is required of all cities within the state's coastal zone.

Half Moon Bay is in the process of updating its LCP and when Half Moon Bay Planning Commission Chair Rick Hernandez heard through the grapevine that Lester was interested in working with the city, the planning commissioner invited him over for coffee.

"I was blown away by his knowledge and experience and thought he would be a terrific resource," Hernandez wrote in an email to the Review. "He has been involved with the Coastal Commission since its earliest days and has the historical perspective, legal understanding and temperament to help us navigate the best path forward."

Lester's work with the city began over the summer with background study, noted Half Moon Bay's Planning Manager Jill Ekas. His work on more detailed land use research picked up in September.

For a not-to-exceed amount of \$28,000, Lester's duties will include reviewing draft policy, assisting with the development of land use policy options and "providing general expertise regarding the Coastal Act and related matters," noted Ekas.

During the Oct. 24 Planning Commission meeting, Lester provided a presentation on several key land use issues. That was followed by a question and answer session with commission members.

"I know it's always interesting in Half Moon Bay," Lester said at start of that meeting. "There's a lot of creative tension around the coastal land use issues that you have."

Lester also noted that some of the same priorities outlined in Half Moon Bay's LCP of 1975 still apply today.

Commissioners had questions for Lester around housing and traffic, among other concerns.

Commissioner Jimmy Benjamin noted that with an increase in accessory dwelling units that there might be concerns about demands on water usage. Lester responded that the city might want to look into a water supply analysis and also consider including accessory dwelling units as part of the city's 1 percent planned development per year.

"At the same time, you don't want to prevent affordable housing that might be needed," Lester said.

Commissioner John Evans posed a question about housing and how it relates to traffic.

“It seems like there hasn’t been a lot of houses, but there’s a lot of traffic relative to how many houses are built,” Evans said.

While Lester noted that the traffic factors could be related to tourism factors more than housing, he also pointed to available data and traffic modeling that could signal how much traffic a new hotel or certain number of homes could generate.

Hernandez pointed to the fact that there are between 20 and 40 housing units that are built in Half Moon Bay each year and when placed one at a time, traffic isn’t always considered.

Lester noted that the city has a traffic impact fee that could help offset traffic issues, for example, the money could go toward intersection improvement or can help fund a new roundabout.

Coastsiders will have another opportunity to see Lester at a Dec. 6 event, sponsored by the Committee for Green Foothills. The event starts at 6 p.m. and will be located at the Half Moon Bay Yacht Club.